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ABSTRACT

To improve American education, there must be improved ongoing professional development for teachers and a national plan for helping teachers fulfill their untapped potential. Research shows that quality professional development can improve student achievement. Teachers report that professional development improves their teaching. Despite this, the American school system fails to provide sufficient professional development for teachers. There must be a national plan to direct staff development dollars and teacher time for learning. This plan would evaluate staff development and ensure that quality programs and strategies are encouraged to grow. The National Staff Development Council's set of standards and guidelines for staff development includes: set clear, high standards for learning for all students; hold superintendents, principals, and teachers accountable; invest in teacher learning; review school improvement plans; involve all teachers in continuous, intellectually rigorous study of what and how they teach; embed opportunities for professional learning and collaboration into the school day; provide teachers with classroom assessment and action research skills; and recognize the importance of skillful school and district leaders. This booklet describes what is needed at the national level, state, and local levels, providing models that show what professional development should be to transform education and explaining how to actually make this change. (Contains 22 references.) (SM)

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A National Plan For Improving Professional Development

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A National Plan for Improving Professional Development

By Dennis Sparks and Stephanie Hirsh

Virtually every effort to improve the quality of education since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 has focused on overcoming deficits in student knowledge or on reshaping the structure and organization of schooling. These reforms—ranging from encouraging more students to take harder courses to establishing charter and voucher schools, from testing and holding schools accountable to lowering class size, and from raising student self esteem to creating schools within schools—all have largely left the classroom untouched.

Despite a decade and a half of reform talk, teachers mostly continue to teach as they have in the past. In the absence of substantial professional development and training, many teachers naturally gravitate to the familiar methods they remember from their own years as students. For instance, a 1998 study from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that only a little more than half of teachers say they are using instructional strategies aligned with high standards (56 percent) and assisting all students to achieve (52 percent). [NCES: *What Happens in Classrooms?* 1998] Moreover these percentages are almost certainly inflated. A videotape study of eighth grade mathematics teachers conducted as part of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study found that most teachers, even those who say they use reform methods, still teach with traditional practices. [Stigler, Gonzales, Kawanaka, Knoll, and Serrano. *The TIMSS Videotape Classroom Study*, NCES 1999] In short, a school may be state-of-the-art charter, voucher-supported, magnet, or even school-within-a-school without greatly affecting the teaching that takes place inside the classroom. As a result, student achievement for most has remained stagnant, even as society's expectations for graduates rose.

All too often, in their zeal for visible reforms, educational leaders, policymakers, and the public have avoided the crucial role played by the teacher. Assuming that teachers are interchangeable parts whose knowledge and abilities do not matter, they search for the right organization that would make schools work regardless of what teachers do. A few programs try to minimize the role of the teacher, producing "teacher-proof" materials and prepackaged lessons that spell out everything the teacher is to say and do. When people do pay attention to teachers, it is usually to demand the use of teacher testing to target low scorers for dismissal or the abolishment of tenure so principals can fire "inferior" teachers.

In reality, a growing body of research shows that improving teacher knowledge and teaching skills is essential to raising student performance. Students spend the vast majority of their time in school either interacting in some way with teachers or working under teachers' direction. Naturally enough, what teachers know and can do directly affects the quality of student learning. Other reforms – from smaller classes to charters to testing – are effective only to the degree that they affect what goes on behind the classroom door.

America's recent push to reform the schools has created high standards, rigorous tests, and strict accountability measures in the hopes that these would force schools to improve the education they provide students. Supporters of these plans postulate that schools and teachers already know what to do but simply need to work harder and demand more from students. Many states have already reached the limits of this strategy; they can align curriculum to standards and tests but ultimately improvements come down to how well teachers understand the standards and instructional techniques to reach all students. If states want teachers to radically change their

results to get all students achieving, they must give teachers the tools, support, and training to radically change their practice. America cannot climb past its current achievement plateau without educating teachers, administrators, and other educators on what they need to do to reach the higher levels.

Therefore, to improve the education we provide our children, our nation must improve the ongoing professional development it provides teachers and create a national plan for helping teachers fulfill their untapped potential. We can no longer hope that a random selection of courses and consultants will provide teachers with the knowledge and teaching techniques they need to bring all students to higher standards. Improving American education requires creating an organized staff development plan to upgrade the quality of teaching by keeping all educators, and all those who support these educators, learning throughout their careers.

Quality Professional Development Can Raise Student Achievement

In the United States, we celebrate individual teachers through awards and movies like *Music of the Heart* and *Stand and Deliver*, yet do little to help all educators reach outstanding levels. Acting on an assumption that great teachers are born, not made, our schools frequently hire unqualified and undertrained teachers – such as military veterans and Ivy League graduates – to be teachers after they have taken just a short summer course. Studies show that nearly a quarter of newly hired American teachers lack the qualifications for their job and more than 40 states allow districts to hire teachers who have not met basic requirements. [NCTAF, 1996] It is therefore not surprising that schools do not recognize the importance of investing in quality teaching and supporting teacher learning. But ignoring ways to help teachers develop their skills and knowledge ignores the critical link between student performance and teaching; not surprisingly, studies show that students with better teachers learn more.

A Texas study of 900 districts conducted by Ronald Ferguson of Harvard University found that teacher expertise (as measured by teacher education, licensing examination scores, and experience) explains 40 percent of the difference in student achievement in reading and mathematics. Teacher quality explains most of the gap in achievement between African-American and white students (after controlling for socioeconomic status). Ferguson's study also reveals how teacher quality can be improved; every dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers produced greater increases in student achievement than a dollar spent on any other single program. [NCES 1997 citing Ferguson 1991] Similarly, a Boston study by Bain and Company found that students of the top-third teachers produced gains on math tests that exceeded the national median while the bottom third showed virtually no growth. A study of schools in New York City found that differences in teacher qualifications accounted for 90 percent of the variation in student achievement in reading and mathematics. [Armour-Thomas, Clay, Domanico, Bruno, & Allen, 1989] The evidence showing the influence of quality teachers is so overwhelming that the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) called for a nationwide commitment to provide every child with a caring and competent teacher. [NCTAF, 1996] Even Eric Hanushek, the University of Rochester economist who frequently writes that school spending does not have much impact on student achievement, admits that "the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher can be a full level of achievement in a single year." [Haycock, 1999]

By taking the more than three million teachers already in schools and helping them become more effective, staff development can produce immediate gains in teacher quality. For example, a 1998 study by David Cohen and Heather Hill at the University of Michigan found a relationship between teacher participation in curriculum workshops and scores on California's state assessment, even when controlling for teachers' past learning. Sustained participation in professional development activities tied to California's elementary school mathematics curriculum successfully improved teachers' knowledge of mathematics and their ability to transfer this knowledge to students. This effect was even higher when the professional development included information about the test. [Cohen and Hill, 1998] The National School Boards Foundation even called investment in teacher learning, "the primary policy lever that school boards have to raise student achievement." [National School Boards Foundation, March 1999]

Staff development helps prepare teachers for the complexities of educating the millennial generation with the advanced skills and knowledge they will need for the unknown future. It helps teachers enhance their knowledge of content so they are better able to answer students' questions, enliven lessons, and help students solve problems. It expands teachers' repertoire of instructional skills so they can determine the best method to match an individual student's specific needs and helps principals and other administrators learn new ways to lead and inspire. In addition, staff development can encourage all of the school's educators to adopt attitudes that support high levels of learning, including the belief that virtually all students can learn at high levels and meet national standards.

A study from NCES found that teachers who attended professional development activities focused on standards were much more likely to teach using reform activities that raise students' achievement. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of teachers *with* the professional development reported that they used three or more activities compared to only a third (35 percent) of those *without* professional development. In addition, three out of five (61 percent) of those without professional development reported using no reform activities compared to fewer than two out of five (39 percent) of those with the training. [NCES: *Status*, 1998]

Parents and the public understand the need for qualified teachers. A survey by Recruiting New Teachers found that nearly twice as many people (55 percent) thought that the quality and caliber of teachers had the greatest influence on student learning compared with establishing a system of standards (30 percent) and requiring achievement tests (14 percent). Three out of five respondents (61 percent) strongly favor lengthening the school year by two weeks to allow more time for teacher consultation and planning while seven in ten (71 percent) agree that public schools should pay teachers for longer work days so they have time to stay abreast of new developments in their own field. [Recruiting New Teachers, 1998]

Moreover, teachers themselves report that teacher professional development has improved their teaching. More than four out of five teachers participating in professional development said it provided them with new information (85 percent), nearly two thirds reported it caused them to change their teaching practices (65 percent), more than three in five said that professional development programs caused them to seek further information or training (62 percent), and two out of five reported that the programs changed their views on teaching (42 percent). [NCES, *Toward*, July 1998]

America's Inadequate Professional Development

Unfortunately, despite the importance of quality teacher learning to improved student performance, the American school system fails to provide sufficient staff development. The typical school district currently allocates only about one percent of its budget for improving the abilities of its staff. Fewer than half of teachers reported receiving released time to attend professional development (47 percent) and nearly a quarter (23 percent) said they were given no support, time, or credit for professional development. [NCES: *Toward, 1998*] Only 19 percent of teachers had a mentor teacher and two-thirds did not participate in a formal induction program during their first year on the job. [NCES: *Teacher Quality*, 1999]

Moreover, even when states and school districts are willing to pay more to educate their staff, the professional development most teachers receive is of only limited quality. Although nine in 10 teachers state they spent an average of 42 hours on professional development activities (including meetings, workshops, and conferences) in the 1994-1995 academic year, a NCES report found that only one in five teachers felt very well prepared to integrate educational technology into their instruction or to teach limited English proficient students, culturally diverse students, and students with disabilities. Just two out of five teachers feel well prepared to implement new teaching methods and just over one-third say they are well prepared to implement higher standards. [NCES: *Status*, 1998] Clearly, this training is not providing educators with the knowledge and skills they need to help students succeed.

This failure may be due to one-shot workshops and schoolwide presentations of new methods that lack connections to the challenges teachers face in the classroom. The current "proof of purchase" system of rewarding teachers with higher pay based on the number of graduate courses they have on their transcript simply encourages teachers to take a hodgepodge of miscellaneous courses that are not necessarily linked to the school's plans or students' needs. There is no incentive for these programs to improve teachers' performance since all staff development experiences count equally for salary enhancement, certificate maintenance, and career mobility. [Stout, "Staff Development Policy" 1996] These "adult pull-out programs" of disjointed lectures frequently leave teachers no better off than before, leading some to collect course credit without ever using these courses to change their instruction.

This status quo is especially alarming at a time when standards are raising demands for what teachers and students should know and be able to do, and when, teacher shortages and efforts to lower class size are propelling more untrained teachers into the classroom. Already nearly a third of math teachers, and a quarter of science, social studies, and English teachers lack full-state certification and a college major in the field they teach. Without staff development, most of these teachers will be ineffective. Even those teachers who initially received an outstanding preservice teacher education still need additional quality staff development simply because of changes in standards and expectations since their initial preparation. Many districts spend nearly 90 percent of operational funds on personnel, so they should be obligated to make sure these employees are trained, well-prepared, and supported.

What Can Be Done?

The most effective way to improve the achievement of our students is to improve the quality of teaching. No effort to improve the quality of education for all students, especially for

the most disadvantaged, can succeed unless it changes the way in which teachers teach and students learn. However, even if states and districts were willing to spend millions of dollars on staff development, this investment would be wasted without a plan to direct staff development dollars and teacher time for learning to the best possible programs and methods. Such a plan would evaluate staff development and ensure that quality programs and strategies are recognized and encouraged to grow.

Improving staff development requires empowering educators to develop new models for integrating learning into all aspects of the school. Effective staff development, researchers say, is:

- Results-driven and job-embedded;
- Focused on helping teachers become deeply immersed in subject matter and teaching methods;
- Curriculum-centered and standards-based;
- Sustained, rigorous, and cumulative; and
- Directly linked to what teachers do in their classrooms.

Effective professional development makes the connection between subject matter and pedagogy. It expands teachers' repertoire of research-based instructional methods to teach that content and help students master new skills. Such programs create regular opportunities for serious collaborative planning, develop classroom assessment skills, and connect teachers to other professionals within and beyond their schools.

A growing number of researchers and policymakers are working on plans to upgrade staff development programs and focus them on improving the learning of all students. For example, participants in the 1999 National Education Summit called on states and educators to target their professional development resources on programs that give teachers the content knowledge and skills to teach to higher standards. This plan would change teacher compensation programs to provide salary credit for professional development only when it is standards-based, linked to state and district priorities, and part of schoolwide plans to raise student achievement. [Achieve, 1999] Likewise, researcher Julia E. Koppich, in a report for the Brookings Institution, also stressed the importance of requiring accountability and concentrating federal professional development dollars on increasing teachers' subject-matter knowledge and mastery of teaching methods. She urged states to establish an accountability test for teacher professional development: "Does it contribute to higher levels of student learning?" [Koppich, draft]

In addition, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), a non-profit professional association devoted to staff development and school improvement, created a set of standards and guidelines for staff development that schools and districts can use to evaluate professional development. NSDC recommends that school systems:

- **Set clear and high standards for the learning of all students** and then focus on the changes in practice required to achieve student-learning goals.
- **Hold superintendents and principals, as well as teachers, accountable** for student achievement and the provision of high-quality staff development in their annual performance reviews.
- **Invest in teacher learning**, ideally allocating at least 10 percent of their budgets to staff development.

- **Review school improvement plans** to ascertain that they focus on student learning and specify effective methods for reaching these goals.
- **Involve all teachers in the continuous, intellectually rigorous study** of the content they teach and the ways they teach it.
- **Embed opportunities for professional learning** and collaborating with colleagues in the daily schedule of teachers. NSDC advocates that at least 25 percent of teacher time be devoted to their own learning. Schools should schedule more time for collaborating with colleagues.
- **Provide teachers with classroom assessment and other action research skills** that allow them to determine on a regular basis if student learning has been improved because of their new knowledge and skills.
- **Recognize the importance of skillful leaders** in schools and at the district level who have a deep understanding of instruction, curriculum, assessment, and the organizational factors that affect student learning.

These guidelines are the first step to a new national strategy for staff development. The challenge now is to create new policies and structures on the national, state, and local level that ensure that all teachers have access to the kind of training and knowledge they need to help students achieve high standards.

National Level: The Need for a National Center on Professional Development

Education in the United States historically has been a responsibility of the state and local government. The national role is largely limited to protecting rights of various groups, funding compensatory programs, advising states, and conducting research. While these powers may seem limited, its research and advisory functions are vital to the improvement of education. This can only happen, however, when research is guided into the right channels and spread throughout the K-12 system.

We recommend the creation of a National Center on Professional Development that will:

- Conduct and monitor research on effective staff development and the links between professional development and student learning;
- Determine the necessary conditions and resources required in states, school districts, and schools to use staff development to its full potential;
- Provide technical assistance to states;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of programs and inform "consumers" of those findings;
- Monitor, analyze, and disseminate policy modes that are effective in promoting quality staff development; and,
- Function as a research and information dissemination clearinghouse to publicize research findings.

A National Center could be convened by the U.S. Department of Education and housed in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, with additional funding by states, corporations, and foundations. It could provide states and districts with tools to measure the quality and effectiveness of programs, help them understand more about building the leadership required for staff development, and assist them in determining staff development needs across core subject areas. Its research and materials would show states and districts how to use staff development successfully to achieve the vision of a standards-based reform agenda. The Center would focus on how to change the classroom experience for teachers and students through professional development. Ultimately, its work would show how to use professional development to strengthen teaching and improve student learning.

School districts spend between $1,700 to $3,500 per teacher on staff development. [Stout, 1996 (citing research of Little and Miller, Lord, and Dorney.)] In the absence of a system to evaluate professional development programs regularly, a lot of this money is wasted on ineffective and inconsequential programs. In addition to its important research and development function, the Center could help discover, publicize, and disseminate new models for effective staff development and, unlike existing research labs, provide a stamp of approval for quality programs. The Center would also be able to sort through existing research and projects to direct new information into the hands of practitioners who can use it. Ultimately, the Center would help advance efforts to create new models for collective bargaining contracts that include provisions for collaborative staff development to ensure that teacher learning can be better integrated into the school day. It would assist states and districts in the development of coherent, systemic professional development plans to replace their current fragmented policies.

Research and Evaluation

A National Center on Professional Development would enable states and school districts to learn from policy research and statistical analysis of productivity and quality. The Center could help address critical issues in the field, including how to measure the effectiveness of staff development and how to strengthen the links between staff development and student achievement. By forging connections to both research universities and K-12 schools, the Center could break the tradition of conducting research in a vacuum without consulting practitioners. It could direct researchers to follow the lead of schools, finding out what educators need to know, rather than just floating out their own research in the hopes a school might find it useful. It also can serve as a home for the U.S. Department of Education's model professional development awards programs. Researchers could investigate how these high-performing schools and districts allocate their resources for professional development and then suggest ways for other schools and districts to replicate this success.

Now that standards for staff development have been created, American education needs a way of evaluating and certifying quality staff development programs much as the "Good Housekeeping" seal of approval validates home care products and the Department of Agriculture approves food products. One model for how to do this is NSDC's recent publication, *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development*, funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. This book provides a list of the 26 content-specific staff development programs in the core content areas that have evidence of their impact on student achievement. No such compilation exists for elementary and high school grades. The Center can build on this work by reviewing various professional development programs, measuring their effectiveness at achieving a defined set of benchmarks, and then sharing the results. It can establish a standard

method for reviewing programs and rating their quality. At the same time, it could examine state and local policies to ensure that they develop environments and structures compatible with quality staff development and learning.

Trained program evaluators, such as those used by the U.S. Department of Education's Model Professional Development Awards program, should conduct these reviews of programs and techniques using common procedures and benchmarks. The evaluation process needs to shift from counting how many staff members participate and whether they enjoyed the session to determining the needs of the school and the evidence that the program is meeting these needs and improving student achievement. The evaluation should not be rigidly tied to teacher or student performance on multiple-choice tests but also should look for evidence that the staff development program has met the standards of the NSDC and other groups, changed teacher attitudes, affected what teachers do in the classroom, and helped prepare teachers to meet the rigorous standards of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Above all else, staff development programs and policies need to present evidence of how they benefit students.

This Center on Professional Development would differ from existing regional research laboratories and the National Research and Development Center on Policy and Teaching Excellence in its focus on schools and practitioners. Its major purpose would be the development of information about quality professional development programs and the sharing of this information with educators in schools. It can tackle projects of nationwide scope—such as evaluating and certifying effective professional development programs—and organize research on the effects of different forms of professional development on student achievement. The Center's concentration on professional development will enable it to perform more in-depth work than centers with broader purposes.

Dissemination of Information and Tools to the Field

While the federal government, academic researchers, and others conduct mounds of research in education, few involved in this system, let alone teachers, know about this research. All too often, practitioners are out of the information loop, unaware of research findings. For all schools and districts to develop better staff development programs, leaders need access to better information. Staff development should be grounded in solid research, not only to convey the best teaching methods and appropriate curriculum content, but also to help school staff understand the process of change and how to work collaboratively to solve problems, alter the school's culture, and build structures that support teacher learning. States, districts, and schools need information about which staff development programs have been successful in increasing teacher knowledge about their subject areas, subject-specific pedagogy, and student achievement. This information needs to be shared across districts and states.

Fortunately, technology has evolved to the point where it can solve the problem of dissemination. Through technology, the same Center on Professional Development that conducts research could also act as a clearinghouse—disseminating the findings on the Internet in a format that makes them accessible to anyone with a computer and modem. Because virtually every school and public library is linked to the Internet, posting information online may be the most cost-effective way to ensure that educators, administrators, and trainers of teachers can find information as it is needed. This Center can present models and exemplars for what quality staff development looks like through text, pictures, and even video. Any school would be able to download images of teachers doing lesson study or other forms of collaboration. Using the Internet to disseminate information would enable educators to access information instantly

when they are ready to use it as opposed to the long wait required by a traditional paper-and-mail information clearinghouse.

Because such a Center would be an extension of the national government's research and advisory role it would not violate local control of education. Instead, it would help provide information for state and local governments to make their own choices about what form of staff development they would prefer and what features they consider most important.

A Better Role for States

Because local school districts only have the power and authority delegated to them by states, policy improvements and changes that support staff development must be targeted at the state level. States can set policies and provide resources, for example, to provide all new teachers with a mentor, increase funding and time for quality staff development, and determine and monitor how money is spent. It can change the definition of staff development to include collaborative activities and efforts by schools to determine how to best meet their specific needs. It also could require the alignment of evaluation components and professional development plans with standards for teachers, schools and districts. States could require the linkage of *school* professional development with *teacher* professional development plans.

Increase Funding for Quality Professional Development

Lacking a correct understanding of how staff development can improve teachers' effectiveness, many school districts have been reluctant to spend money on staff development. Instead, they rely on large numbers of administrators and specialists; more than half of school district employees in the United States are not classroom teachers (compared with less than a quarter in the Japanese system). [NCTAF 1996, p. 49] But if this country truly wants more capable teachers who can produce better results in the classroom, it needs to increase funding for staff development and ensure that every dollar spent on professional development is really an investment in learning. A study by Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine found that student achievement goes up more for every $500 spent on increasing teacher professional training than for spending the same amount on raising teacher salaries or reducing class size. [Greenwald et. al. 1996]

Currently, the typical school spends only 0.5 percent of its budget on raising the abilities of its staff while the typical private-sector company spends nearly four times as much. [Klein et. al 1996] This disparity may explain why education has been slower in responding to changing technology and societal needs. For this reason, NSDC recommends that districts increase their spending on staff development to at least 10 percent of the school budget.

Some states and districts are working to change this situation. Illinois appropriates $4 million of state funds for teacher professional development. Kentucky provides $23 per child, Florida spends $4 per child, and Massachusetts allocates $10 million for local districts through a formula. In Missouri, after the state received a court order to redesign its finance system, a coalition of education organizations convinced the state to spend two percent of all K-12 funding on staff development. States can increase their staff development funds by reducing their control and monitoring functions since better-trained teachers would require less oversight.

Despite this progress, much still needs to be done. States need to keep better track of how much is spent on professional development, what the sources of these funds are, and how this

money is spent. We need to determine if that money is spent wisely or if it should be reallocated to more successful forms of staff development. For example, the salary raises schools pay to teachers with advanced degrees can be considered a cost of staff development. A state may find that this money can be better invested in a pay-for-knowledge plan rather than the current pay-for-credentials system that pays even when the course is unrelated to what the teachers do in their classroom.

Require High-Quality Professional Development

Many states require that teachers participate in professional development in order to maintain their certification. Unfortunately, many states perpetuate outdated ideas about what constitutes staff development by paying for seat time in courses or workshops (e.g. continuing education units). Yet research shows that collaborative schoolwide forms of staff development may have more power to change the culture of a school and update teachers on better ways to help students learn. Therefore, it is simply common sense for states to redefine what counts for professional development.

As with everything else, not all staff development is of the same quality. Most states currently treat all staff development programs as equal, without an attempt to measure their productivity. Instead, states should insist that schools use research-validated staff development practices and that they require outside providers to present evidence that their programs work. This assessment should be performed using evidence from federal research or third-party evaluation whenever possible. This state system would hold teachers accountable for the student achievement they produce as a result of their professional development, and hold principals accountable for the change in the performance of their teachers. The evaluation system should have significant consequences that will demand that programs and staff provide evidence about results.

For example, Staff Development Leadership Councils (SDLCs) in Texas and Illinois are working on systems weighting the recertification credits that teachers earn from attending staff development courses and seminars based on evidence of improved practice and student results. Teachers seeking recertification must show more than just the requisite amount of "seat time"; they have to prove that they have put this learning to use in ways that benefit students.

Local Role in Creating Learning Schools

In the end, education remains a local responsibility and many of the new, more powerful forms of collaborative professional development need to take place in local districts and schools. Therefore, a plan to improve educator staff development will need to focus on change at the local level— encouraging schools to make more time available, increasing collaboration among staff, and altering the culture of the school to one that supports learning for all staff members as well as students. Currently, fragmented policies and expectations convey mixed messages to the local level and divides the limited funds in ways that dilute their impact. Local schools and districts need to align and structure the staff development system to meet the needs of students and teachers.

A New Model – the Learning School

Ultimately, the purpose of staff development on the local level is to change school culture and attitudes so that educators become better equipped to help all students reach high levels. As any of the survivors of previous reform attempts could testify, changing education is a difficult task that goes beyond just drafting new requirements or presenting a new method in a lecture or workshop. By contrast, in a learning school all staff members are engaged in sustained, intellectually rigorous study of what they teach and how they teach it. They replace the traditional model of isolated "adult pull-out programs" with an entire school focused on increasing learning collaboratively. Teachers learn better when they learn together and support one another in planning more advanced lessons, improving the quality of their students' work, and solving the day-to-day problems of teaching and learning. Such a school embeds staff development into all of its daily activities.

A learning school would allow more time for staff to work and plan together. Departments would have common planning time so teachers can study the standards together, create more powerful lessons with their peers, practice and share new teaching methods, and solve problems collaboratively. Schools would organize sets of teachers who share responsibility for the same students and provide them with time to meet and discuss individual students' strengths, weaknesses, and personal issues. The school would assign a mentor to new teachers and teachers showing difficulties. All teachers would have the opportunity to sit in on lessons from other teachers. They would conduct research, plan together, analyze student work in groups to develop mutual understanding of excellent and acceptable work, and share successful methods and teaching tips. They would organize programs that empower teachers to help each other, such as peer-coaching and peer-observation of each other's classrooms. Teachers would become experts in a particular teaching method and then teach it to others.

Because teachers in learning schools continue to learn and expand their knowledge of both content and teaching strategies, they are better able to adapt to growing challenges and changes in students and to higher standards. In these schools professional development is not a one-shot workshop or self-improvement project by an isolated teacher. Instead the whole staff determines its own needs and decides how it wishes these needs to be met. Staff development becomes incorporated into everything the teachers do. The school may choose to bring in consultants for specific tasks or send a few teachers for additional training in a particular area. But in this model all staff development is planned around specific needs of the school and is linked to specific school improvement goals.

Provide More Time for Professional Development

Transforming existing schools into these learning schools will require substantial changes in how schools schedule teachers and time. For teachers to become continuous learners who are ready to face the challenges of higher standards and changing student needs, they need more time to learn and grow. Yet, time is a scarce resource during the school day; most staff development programs (between 60 and 80 percent) last under eight hours. This is not long enough to have much impact; studies indicate that teachers who participated in a professional development activity that lasted eight hours or more were three to five times more likely to say that the activity improved their teaching a lot as were teachers with a shorter activity. Similarly, teachers who participated in weekly common planning periods for team teachers were four times more likely to say that participation improved their teaching a lot than were those who only participated occasionally (52 percent versus 13 percent). [NCES: *Teacher Quality, 1999*]

To fix this, NSDC recommends that states and districts increase to 25 percent the time available during the school day for teachers to work together and collaboratively plan lessons and share information. Just as rehearsing is part of the job of an actor and creating new recipes part of being a chef, much of the work of teachers is thinking and planning with their colleagues.

Schools can find this time by reorganizing the whole day and making the schedule more efficient. They can use alternative forms of schedules, like block scheduling, to adjust time between adults and students. In addition, schools can find some of this time by reducing some of the non-teaching duties of the staff. There is no professional reason for teachers to spend time as hall monitors, detention guards, and lunchroom patrollers when they can be using that time for learning.

Increase Collaboration as Part of Professional Development

When most people think of staff development, they automatically think of special programs after school. Most members of the public, accustomed to teamwork and frequent feedback in their own workplace, naturally assume that these interactions occur in the school as well, so professional development needs to be specific training classes. The reality, however, is that it is rare for teachers to visit each other's classrooms; frequently, a tenured teacher may find that no supervisor has set foot into his or her classroom during the entire year. While some teachers may share lesson plans, they rarely develop lessons together. But research shows that one of the most effective forms of professional development takes place when teachers have opportunities to work together and learn from each other throughout the day.

In their book, *The Teaching Gap*, researchers James Stigler and James Hiebert make a case that teachers' methods and the culture of teaching are at least as strong an influence on what students learn as is the content and depth of the curriculum. According to the authors, the lower performance of American students relative to many of their international peers is largely related to how Americans teach. This gap can only be crossed by educators who are working together to improve their lessons and learn new methods. While teachers from other nations have regular opportunities to develop lessons collaboratively, American teachers work largely alone. "The most alarming aspect of classroom teaching in the United States is not how we are teaching now but that we have no mechanism for getting better," write Stigler and Hiebert. "Without such a mechanism, the teaching gap will continue to grow." [Stigler and Hiebert, 1999] Teachers can work on this lesson study during common planning periods or other specified time during the school day.

In addition, schools can build this collaboration by giving some experienced teachers a reduced teaching load in return for mentoring a novice teacher—teaching him or her how to manage a classroom and cope with the millions of details not included in their preservice education. Through collaboration, novice teachers can learn from the experience of veterans, while adding energy and enthusiasm that can help rejuvenate a school. This partnership can help reduce the rate of attrition for new teachers, more than 30 percent of whom leave in their first five years of teaching. [NCTAF, 1996]

A similar amount of released time can be created for experienced teachers to do peer review for less successful teachers. Even though most of the existing discussion on peer review has focused on using it as a way to remove a small percentage of inadequate teachers, it can also be a powerful way of helping teachers improve their practice. In school districts like Rochester, NY, peer review has been used to help teachers become better with the threat of being

"counseled out" held only as a last resort. After all, who would know better how to help a teacher become better than another teacher already providing high-quality instruction?

This model is not a theoretical idea. It is similar to ordinary practice in Japan and other countries whose schools do better than our own. District 2 in New York City uses a variant of this model to change instruction systemwide. Under superintendent Anthony Alvarado the district created a program that trains teachers in specific techniques, arranges time for teachers to visit other schools and classrooms, and pays for consultants to work with teams of teachers on their own problems and goals. [Achieve, 1999] Teachers need to work together to adapt standards to their classrooms and share information on how to improve.

Making the Change

These models show what professional development could and should be to transform education. The challenge now is to create new policies and structures that can support this effort to ensure that all teachers have access to the kind of knowledge and skills they need to help students achieve high standards. Making these slow changes, eliminating fragmentation, adopting more productive forms of staff development, and changing teacher attitudes will be difficult for educators and policymakers who are used to displaying more visible reforms to the public as proof that they are working to fix the schools. It is much harder to measure the increase in teachers' knowledge and abilities than it is to count the number of new charter schools or a reduction in class size. Yet changes in staff development are more meaningful since they affect everything the teacher does in the classroom.

This national plan would help educators, policymakers, and researchers move forward to define, disseminate, and advance models of quality professional development and the tools and policies required to make these models flourish. States must encourage the use of high quality professional development programs for new and experienced teachers. They should increase funding for professional development while requiring school districts to use these funds on programs and procedures that have research support. School districts should press forward with policies that build learning communities by adjusting school schedules to build in common time for teachers to learn together and work collaboratively.

Teacher unions need to evaluate the effectiveness of the staff development programs they provide their members. They should follow the lead of progressive unions like Rochester that have adopted teacher professionalism plans that include a meaningful peer review and improvement process. Unions also should replace traditional salary schedules that raise teachers' pay based on the number of academic courses completed with a salary that pays teachers based on performance—demonstrated knowledge and skill at teaching.

The federal government should develop a National Center on Professional Development that can initiate and manage research on better staff development and then disseminate the results. It should measure the effectiveness of existing programs and study ways to improve staff development for the future. It also would function as a research and information clearinghouse, using the Internet to share its evaluations and research-proven practices.

School staff and researchers must work as partners to increase the utility of staff development for the school and its staff. They need to work together to find better ways to foster cooperation and build a spirit of mutual respect and learning. Principals, administrators, and

teachers need to communicate the needs of school personnel while researchers investigate and communicate the success of various methods.

These changes will ultimately help redefine the role of teacher, cause a fundamental shift in how schools are organized, and create a cultural shift from teachers as industrial workers processing another load of children to teachers as professionals, using their specialized training to guide all children to higher levels of learning.

We cannot expect teachers to teach what they do not know, nor to use yesterday's training to prepare today's students for tomorrow's future. We certainly cannot expect our teachers to share and learn from each other's knowledge and skill unless we provide them with the research, structures, time, and money with which to do it. Ultimately, quality staff development benefits students by channeling the talents and expertise of all the school's teachers in all the school's classrooms. By improving staff development, by creating schools optimized for learning, we will be helping all teachers to excel at helping all students reach the high levels of achievement they need to succeed.

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